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—Bill Eiland



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Cover by Jim Flowers

I N THE DORM

Terry pushed open the door to her room but stopped, her hand halfway to the light switch for she had seen the large, unmistakable shape lying prone across the bed. Deliberately shuffling her books, she walked over to her desk and flicked on a lamp. Three seconds later a foot, pink and defenseless under the hard light, appeared at the left corner of the bed. Making a complete turn the conglomeration of quilts and blankets receded from the pillow so as to display a mass of very curly, very black hair. An eye appeared. Then, except for the chin which remained muffled beneath the quilts, a whole face emerged.

"What time is it?"

Terry, who had been curiously observing the progress of the quilts, glanced at the alarm clock on the dresser. "It's about 5:30."

"God." JoAnn lifted her weight unto her shoulders and glanced about the room as though hoping to find a central point on which to focus her sight. Failing to do so, she looked down at the opened collar of her nightgown and began to fiddle with the buttons.

"What time did you get to bed?" asked Terry.

"No idea. The maids found me in the

study room this morning. I don't even know what time it was when they came in."

Terry smiled, automatically conjuring up a mental image of her friend, zippered inside a sleeping bag and covered with a dictionary and notebooks, as the maids entered to vacuum the carpet. "So how did your test go?" she asked.

JoAnn's hands drew ambiguous circles in the air. "Kaput. Finished. I've flunked the course."

"Aw come on. You probably made an A."

"Terry, baby. You've got too much blind confidence in me. You don't know what kind of tests that man gives."

Terry shrugged, sat down, and arranged her legs across the top of the desk. Taking a crumpled pack of cigarettes from her purse, she fished inside it with her index finger and extracted a crooked cigarette, perhaps the last one in the pack, which she then proceeded to smooth out. "You should've been in German today," she said. "Half the class cut and then, when Carlson asked how many people had worked the exercises, only two kids raised their hands. So he closed the book and just sat there, for about five minutes, I swear to God,

just staring at us with this blank, real lost look on his face."

"Poor man," said JoAnn. "Did he ask about me?"

"What? No. I just told you, half the class cut. Anyway, I think he just does it for effect. The blank look on his face I mean."

"Maybe he was really hurt."

"I doubt it." Terry lit a match and grimaced as the burnt sulphur drifted into her right eye. Without looking up at JoAnn, she asked, "Are you gonna go eat?"

"I don't know. When are you going?"

"I already have."

"Oh. I guess I'll just have some soup here. Maybe get a hamburger later."

Terry shook her head. "Keep up the soup bit and you're going to get terribly emaciated."

"That'll be the day," said JoAnn.

"You refuse to believe me?" Terry lifted one eyebrow and tapped her cigarette ash quite matter-of-factly into the cup of her hand.

JoAnn laughed noisily. "No, no, Doctor. I'll do anything you say."

Despite her efforts to keep a straight face, Terry gave away a grin. For a moment she stared straight ahead and looked pensive, even worried. Then she smiled again. "Oh, guess what," she said suddenly. "Our illustrious roommate won't be here tonight."

JoAnn shrugged. "So she's got a date. So what?"

"No. I mean, she won't be coming in at all. She's spending the night out."

JoAnn raised her eyebrow. "Jeff?"

"Uh-huh."

"Mmm. Are we supposed to do anything about it? Take any messages or anything?"

"Not that I know of. I saw her over at the Union and she told me, very casually sort of, that she was leaving right after her last

class. Said she was coming right over to pick up her things."

A look of total incredulity came over JoAnn's face. "I didn't hear her," she said.

"You probably slept right through it. Or maybe she just decided to go the way she was dressed. She probably wants to look, how does she say it, terribly natural. She thinks that—"

JoAnn interrupted. "We don't have to worry about it, do we?" she asked.

"Worry about what?"

"Well, I mean—she's not really like that, right?"

Terry's face mirrored no feeling whatsoever. Absently, she smoothed the back of her hair. "I don't know—don't care really, is what I should say."

"I mean," JoAnn persisted, "Susan's not really like that. Don't you think so, Terry?"

Terry pressed two fingers against the space between her eyes, as if suddenly a great weight had been implanted on the bridge of her nose. She yawned. "I wouldn't worry about it."

Left alone, Terry sat for a long time alternately observing the pattern of shadows in the crevices of the venetian blinds and the reflection her feet cast against the polished surface of the desk. When she finally stood up, it took her a long time to do so. First, she lowered her feet to the floor. Then, automatically feeling with her toes for the wooden bar between the carpet and the wall, she slumped down into the chair, placed her wrists against the framework of the desk and pushed away. Standing up, Terry glanced about the room and shivered. She shivered again, held her arms against her sides, and lowered her chin into the collar of her shirt. She had, of course, noticed the general state

of messiness not uncommon to the room. Turning suddenly, she began walking around the room, compulsively kicking shoes under the beds of their respective owners, and emptying ashtrays. When she reached the bookshelf, Terry stopped. Letting her glance skip over the psychology and sociology books—Susan's contribution to their communal library—Terry skipped over to next shelf, knowing beforehand, that it would reveal an unappetizing conglomeration of political and quasi-anarchical works. Her own top shelf was filled largely with novels by contemporary authors, some poetry and a few critical works. The middle shelf, representative of Terry's and JoAnn's efforts to edify any philosophical or religious inclinations either of the three girls might manifest, consisted of anything from Kierkegaard to Watts, with a couple of Fromm selections which had been carefully extracted from Susan's bottom shelf. In their entirety, the appearance of the bookshelves was commensurate with the attempts of three amateur librarians at filling a significant gap on one of the walls of their room—a gap within which, alas, there existed smaller gaps. Some of the empty spaces were discreetly small, others impressively large, but all had been promptly stuffed with various items: two radios, a broken hair dryer, a few bottles of Pabst adorned with paper flowers, a black candle and a white one, and, at one spot, a carton of cigarettes.

Terry pressed her forehead against the wooden shelf and took a deep breath. Aloud she said, "Listen, tonight I need something light and if possible meaningful." She pronounced 'meaningful' with a slight nasal stress on the ing. "I need something that will transport me." Her eyes were level with JoAnn's collection of judicial cases when she spotted, miscellaneously tucked between The Failure of American Diplomacy and The Limits Of Power, a rather worn, paperback copy of

A Moveable Feast. With a flick of the wrist she fished the book out, and with another expertly sent it flying across the room to have it land at the foot of her bed. Terry strutted across the carpet, did an about face, and dropped down forcefully on the bed. Retrieving the book, she laid it by her side and arranged her head in a reading position against the backboard of the bed. But she did not read. Instead she listened to the sounds which effused from the hall—familiar sounds. The droning of hair dryers, music and the six-thirty news vibrating nonchalantly from a myriad radios, running water and the clicking of glass over the sink in the shower room two doors down, voices, even an occasional buzzer summoning a girl downstairs to the lobby. Terry gave no outward signs of being intimidated by the sounds, which, in their complexity, signified the Friday night syndrome of a girl's dorm. Terry had perhaps heard the ritualistic sounds sixty nights before and was, in some ways, prepared to hear them for the rest of the school year. It wasn't the fact that other people had dates that annoyed her, but, rather, the people that had the dates. She was inspecting her fingernails when a girl in slip and rollers thrust her head inside the door. "You Terry?" she asked; then, without pausing for a response, "Phone for you."

Terry walked slowly down the hall to the phone booth, her bow-legged, almost languid stride giving out no information as to what thoughts might be going through her head. "Hello," she breathed into the mouthpiece.

"Hi! It's me."

"Oh, hi."

"How's everybody?" The voice at the other end of the line did not actually ask for information. Rather, it formulated a statement meant to emphasize the different positions of the two speakers.

"O.K." said Terry. "You didn't come to Logic."

"Isn't that funny. I forgot. To be perfectly honest, I thought it'd be all right, just this once."

"You didn't come by here either, did you?"

"No, no. I thought it'd be best just to go, you know, sort of come as you are." Getting no response, the voice held its fire, took a deep breath, and tried a new approach. "Hey! Ask me how I'm doing?"

Terry suppressed a laugh. "I don't know," she said. "How are you doing?"

"Great, great. Hear all that noise. That's Jeff-cooking. Can you imagine? And Bill and Dale are here. You know Bill and Dale Britling with the--"

"Yes, go on."

"Anyway, they've brought their dog. It's just a puppy actually but you should--"

"Look Susan," Terry tried to keep her voice as neutral as possible. "Did you just want to talk or did you want us to do something? Now think."

"As a matter of fact--yes. I just remembered, could you possibly sign me out?"

"Where should I say you're going?"

"Oh, Christ, I don't know. Anywhere. Anywhere you think I haven't signed out to recently."

Terry pressed her open palm against the side of the phone. Her lips moved slowly as if they were re-reading or trying to decipher a very old piece of graffiti someone had printed on the metallic stand of the apparatus. "Auburn all right?" she asked.

"God. Yes, sure. I mean that would be feasible wouldn't it? I mean, aren't they having a game there or something?"

"Uh-huh. I think so."

"Great. And Terry--" the voice paused as if to organize and reconsider--"if anybody asks where I am, any of those obnoxious characters in our hall, if they ask--"

"I'll tell them you flew home for the week-end."

"No, don't. Just say I didn't leave any messages."

Terry nodded but hung up without having verbalized a response.

After the phone call, Terry did not return immediately to her room. Instead, she stopped by room 115, pushed the door open, and without bothering to turn on the light, walked directly towards the first bed on the left. Sliding her hand along the space between the backboard and the wall, she grabbed the handle of a guitar case and pulled the case unto the bed. She opened the lid, picked the polished instrument up by the neck, and started to walk out the door. She did not, however, give more than a quick glance to the sheet of flowered notepaper which had been scotch-taped to the wall. On it someone had carefully printed DO NOT-repeat-DO NOT BORROW MY GUITAR. VIOLATORS WILL BE PROSECUTED ACCORDINGLY.

"What I can't figure out," JoAnn was saying, "is how she could possibly break it." She was sitting Buddha-fashion on the bed, holding the base of a large mirror between her ankles. At regular intervals she adjusted the mirror while, with her free hand, she inserted long bobby pins crossways on the rollers in her hair. "I mean, what did she do, sit on it?" She addressed the brown-haired girl who, like herself, was sitting cross-legged at the end of the bed. "I don't know," said the girl. "She just broke it."

With her foot Terry kicked the door shut behind her. She pointed the guitar, neck-front, at JoAnn. "All right," she said forcing a deep voice, "this will be phallic symbol number one for the night." Her voice resumed its normal tone. "Hello, Brenda," she added. Brenda

lifted a hand and held it up momentarily.

JoAnn giggled. "Don't tell me. I can guess. You're going to serenade us," she said musically.

"Smart ass," mumbled Terry but she smiled. She looked up at neither girl and addressed them both. "Actually," she said, "I just plan to practice some new chords."

"I didn't know you could play," said Brenda.

"She can't. Believe me."

"Aaaah." Contracting her stomach muscles, Terry made some drawn-out noise, sonorous in its fashion. She smiled. With her right hand she picked up the little finger of her other and held it in place against one of the strings. Slowly, Terry strummed the guitar. "That sound all right to you?" she asked.

"I guess so," said JoAnn.

"It's supposed to be B minor diminished."

"God. I don't know. I wouldn't know a B minor diminished from an undiminished one if it came up and hit me in the face."

"She should've left me her songbook. That's what she should've done. Carol has the nerve to just pack up for the weekend and not even—"

"Did she say you could borrow it?" asked JoAnn. "The guitar, I mean."

"No." Terry looked up quizzically. "I don't think she really minds, do you?"

Her friend did not respond. Instead, she waved her hands ambiguously in the air and turned towards the other girl. "Anyway," she said. "I'd make her pay for it."

"Oh," said Brenda. "I told her she was gonna have to pay for it. So she told me she'd have to write her mother to ask her for some money. Her mother! You know she's got some money here."

"Wait just a second. Terry, please. Can you try some softer chords?"

"Hmm?"

JoAnn pinched thumb and forefinger together. "Just a teeny bit softer," she said.

Terry paused. "Hm O.K." she said. "Oh, I forgot to tell you. Guess who called?"

"Who?" asked both girls simultaneously.

"Susan."

"Oh," said JoAnn. "She ask about me?"

Terry smiled and drummed her fingers on the guitar. "Uh-uh, not directly, anyway."

"What did she want?" asked Brenda.

"She wanted me to sign her out. She forgot."

"Are you going to?"

"No. I mean yes. I mean, I will—later."

"You gotta be careful about those things," said Brenda. "Miss Jenkins caught Lucy signing Charlene out last week and gave her five demerits. Poof, right on the spot."

"She won't catch me though."

JoAnn grinned. "Terry will do anything for our friend Susan. Even at the risk of getting demerits."

Terry said nothing. She simply stared at JoAnn and held the glance for about ten seconds. "Hey," she said abruptly. "I have a great idea. Brenda, why don't you bring your television in here and—"

"It doesn't work."

"Uh?"

"It's broken. That's what I was telling Jo before you came in. Charlene broke it."

"How did she do that?"

"She just did. She broke off the little knob that turns the set on."

"Christ. Can't you still turn it on anyway? There's usually a little thingie sticking out that you can use."

Brenda closed her eyes. "Uh-uh. There is a little thingie but you'd have to use a pair of pliers or something to make it work."

Terry looked down at her hands then back

at the girls again. "No television then?"

"Hell," she said. "What are we going to do tonight?"

Half an hour later Brenda had left, presumably to do some laundry, and JoAnn had returned from her second but very brief visit to the bathroom. She was sitting on the bed with a patchwork quilt draped over most of her body, and a large, unappetizing looking book balanced across her knees. Terry was lying on the carpet. Feet pressed against the bed, her legs were positioned so as to make a perfect right angle with the floor. Terry was in condition to turn her head at any given moment and face JoAnn directly, even squarely. At the present, however, she was intent on examining the various spots on the ceiling. Suddenly she spoke, "The trouble with this place," she said, "is that—"

"I'm hungry," interrupted JoAnn.

"What?"

"I said, I'm hungry. Why don't we go get a hamburger?"

"I thought you said you had some soup."

"I did but I'm still hungry."

"Get something from the machine."

"Are you crazy? Besides, I don't have any change. Why don't we just go get a hamburger?"

"I don't want to," said Terry tonelessly.

"Why not?" persisted JoAnn.

"I just don't. It's cold out."

JoAnn looked vaguely downcast. She glanced at her book. "Dumb book," she mumbled.

Terry pointed her open hand at the ceiling. "The trouble with this place," she resumed, "is that there is no originality left."

"Mmm." JoAnn had begun to bite her cuticles and was presently examining, with the loving eye of a connoisseur, the reddened skin around her index and forefinger.

"I mean," said Terry. "There's nothing original about this place. The courses are trite, the food is trite, the people are trite. Especially the people. God."

"Yes," conceded JoAnn. "I know what you mean. But still, there's a few kids around who are a little different."

"Who?" taunted Terry. "Who?"

"I don't know. But there's some people."

"Who? Just name me somebody."

"I don't know. The kids at the project."

Terry snorted. "That's not what I meant."

"Well, you said somebody who was different. They're doing something different."

"I did not. I said original."

"Same thing."

Terry turned around and shifted her weight to her right elbow. "It is not the same thing. Hardly the same thing," she shook an adamant finger at her companion. "Look," she said. "Take somebody like Susan. She's supposed to be different, right? At least, that's the impression she tries to give. I mean, she gets her little books and pamphlets out and reads them and talks to you about it, and looks concerned as hell when she does. Even intelligent."

"But she is concerned," interrupted JoAnn. "Sort of."

Terry was not listening. "So you like her for a while. You might even think you respect her for a while because you think," Terry made her voice very deep, "she's doing such a good Humanitarian job at the project. But when it all adds up, poof! She's not really original. She just jumped on a different bandwagon, that's all."

JoAnn looked nonplussed, even hurt. "You're too harsh, Terry," she said. "There's not that many opportunities around."

"Oh, opportunities, my eye. Look," she said. "In high school I used to think, I really did, that when I'd get to college it'd be

different. The people would be different. Not just act or talk different, but that they'd be different.

"Aren't they?" JoAnn partly whispered.

"No, they're not. Everybody's so pretentious and it isn't just the socialites anymore. I mean, we used to look down on them because they were so hung up on throwing big parties and gaining status or whatever, but now everybody's the same. Like the freaks. They're just as bad. You sit around the Union sometime. You do that and you'll overhear about five or six morons talking about the heavy, heavy," Terry mimicked the word, "acid they have, or gossiping about who's been pushing the stuff and who hasn't."

"Terry," interrupted JoAnn, "nobody's perfect. I mean, I know what you mean, but—"

"But what?"

"But you can be like that sometimes too."

Terry looked unaffected, even disappointed at the lack of impact in the statement. "Sure," she said. "Sure. I know that. You don't have to tell me. But that doesn't change anything, does it? I mean, just because—" she stopped and exhaled deeply. "Oh, what's the use! We'll just get depressed."

JoAnn sought to make amends. "You're just bored," she said suddenly. "Why don't you read a book or something? Hey, that's my book on your bed. Ha, ha, how did it get there?" Receiving no answer, she swallowed and tried again. "Why don't you practice the guitar some more, huh. What?"

"I said I'm not in the mood," Terry almost shouted. "Anyway," she jumped to her feet and did a curtsy, "I have to go to the john." She turned around when she heard someone at the door. JoAnn and Terry exchanged furtive glances.

"Come in," said JoAnn.

The door opened a crack and a girl's

face appeared. The girl, although she displayed only her shoulders and part of her torso, was evidently very tall. She had short-cropped brown hair and her eyes, behind thick lenses, looked totally vacant.

"Hello," she said. If she addressed herself to anyone it was to the Aspen ski poster on the wall behind JoAnn's head.

Terry glanced at her furiously.

"Why, hello Marilyn," JoAnn called cheerfully. "Come in."

Terry continued to stare at the girl as though she were some highly undesirable object which had suddenly been forced upon her.

Without taking her eyes off the poster, Marilyn said, "There's a phone call for Terry."

"Who is it?" snapped Terry.

The girl looked offended. "I don't know," she said.

"I mean, is it a girl or a boy?"

"It's a girl."

Terry glanced at JoAnn. "Christ," she said, "that's Susan. Will you get it please?"

JoAnn opened her mouth.

"Please."

Alone in the room, Terry stood up and walked quickly, or rather ran slowly, towards the dresser on which sat a three-speed, glass-cased stereo. At random she selected a record from the high stack of albums and placed it on the machine. When the instrumental music began to play, however, she snapped the reject switch and walked off with no apparent regret. Standing in the center of the room, Terry placed her hands against the nape of her neck, and rocked back and forth on her heels. Suddenly she made a quarter turn, double-stepped her way towards the bed, and began wildly tugging at the quilts. Retracting a pack of Kool's, she shook it until four or five cigarettes tumbled out. She quickly selected one. After two unsuccessful attempts, Terry finally lit her

cigarette. She stood up, inhaled deeply, and walked somewhat unsteadily towards her desk. She had just sat down when she noticed JoAnn standing by the door, arms stretched towards the frame as if for support.

"You can say anything you want," said JoAnn, "but just don't get mad at me."

Terry said nothing.

Perhaps unwilling to interpret her silence, JoAnn said, "That was Susan." She paused. "She wants you to come over."

"What?"

"Now, now," JoAnn's hands made a soothing gesture. "Just calm down. O.K.? She wants you to come over because this friend of Jeff's is in town; in fact, he's over at the apartment, and he wants to meet you."

Terry snorted. "What is he? Sick?"

"No, listen. Susan said that she told him about those two articles you wrote for

Intro and he said he really would like to meet you. He's been working for some kind of magazine, I forgot the name, but it's up in--"

"I'm not going."

"But, Terry, you haven't been out in so long, and Susan really sounded sincere about this guy. Honest, he really--"

"I don't care."

"--sounds very interesting. Even I can tell."

Terry lowered her forehead, almost banged it, against the desk top. "I don't care," she said shutting her eyes. "Tell her I can't go. Tell her I'm dead." A shiver shook her shoulders. Reaching back with both hands, Terry grabbed at the length of her corn-silk hair and brought it around to press the strands against her cheeks. "Tell her anything you want. Tell her--" Very softly, almost inaudibly, she began to sob.

Diana Izquierdo

SEASONAL CHANGES

Samantha was finally pregnant, and the first snow had finally fallen. Pop was silently rejoicing about both as he crunched through the brittle blanket of snow which lay blue and glittering in the moonlight. Winter had become his favorite season since he had retired and realized that there were such things as seasons. Pop felt that he and winter shared a substantial bond since, to his way of thinking, he was winter's human representative. Winter meant that the year had completed its maturing process after its long struggle with spring rains, growth, summer heat, and the bittersweet mellowing of autumn. Surrounding itself with a cold which could be either invigorating or

numbing, spreading about itself a blanket of snow-calm, the year could now rest and watch in the clear, crisp air. So it was with Pop. He was deep into his own winter, and for him it was the best season of his life. Any signs of weakening in his body were overshadowed by the strength of his mind. After eighty-one years, he and senility were still total strangers to each other. Pop was intensely proud of his quick, active intellect.

Pop was equally proud of his granddaughter Samantha. Often he would try to minimize her importance to his happiness, but with little success, for Samantha was as much a part of him as was his mind. When her parents had

died, Samantha had come to him as a little girl, new and unshaped, and now Pop was quite satisfied with every aspect of his finished product. She was a lovely young woman, intelligent, creative, and equipped with a sense of humor which was, Pop was certain, unmatched in all the world's young women. Pop and his granddaughter shared a relationship which was close to being symbiotic: they delighted and nourished each other with their personalities. Now there was to be a third personality for Pop and Samantha to shape together. It was an exciting prospect for Pop, who felt as though the child would be his own, just as Samantha had become. Even the crunch of his footsteps sounded jubilant as he moved across the frozen lawn toward the house.

Edgar was home; too bad. Pop had hoped that maybe he and Samantha could have dinner alone, to celebrate her pregnancy. If Samantha had one fault, it was her husband Edgar. He was stuffy and conventional, a man who did everything methodically and efficiently. His mind was as sluggish as Pop's was sharp, and no one knew this better than Samantha did. She and Pop would match wits as a team against Edgar, who was not sure how he always ended up the butt for their sport. They were the intellects and he was the donkey; they were the comedy team and he was their straight man. Samantha would often let up on Edgar and try to rebuild his deflated ego, which never had a chance against Pop's well-aimed darts. Pop suspected that she humored Edgar with tongue-in-cheek, but it satisfied Edgar and kept him going for round after round with Pop, who never showed him any mercy. Edgar's resentment of Pop must have reached mammoth depths by now, but such a resentment probably embarrassed and shamed a man like Edgar, and he seemed to compensate by hiding every evidence of the tiniest resentment of Pop. This careful civility amused Pop beyond words and made Edgar little

more than a jellyfish in his eyes. It was going to be fun making bad sport of Edgar's child-rearing techniques; he had already tackled Dr. Spock with gusto. After wiping the smile off his face and stamping the snow off his boots, Pop walked into the house and slammed the front door. He knew Edgar would be startled and irritated by the sudden noise.

"Good evening, Pop. Been out for a walk?"

Pop noticed with satisfaction that Edgar was retrieving his pipe from the carpet. "No; I went out to catch forty winks on the front lawn." The most amusing part of all to Pop, who always delivered his lines without smiling, was the fact that Edgar probably wasn't positive that Pop hadn't just had a nap in the yard. Chuckling behind his blank expression, he went out into the hallway to hang up his overcoat.

There was only one time that Pop could remember seeing Edgar pushed beyond his limit. The three of them had been having dinner, and Pop and Samantha had been in particularly high spirits that night. Edgar had lapsed into sullen silence after being target to some of their pointed humor, and Pop and Samantha had turned from this sport to a privately humorous dialogue. Samantha would ask Pop sincerely if he had taken a shower this morning and Pop would answer with concern "No, why? Is one missing?" Then after a moment of silence Pop would ask if Samantha had gotten a haircut, and she would answer seriously that as a matter of fact she had gotten them all cut. Neither of them would show any evidence of laughter as they went on and on, getting funnier and funnier.

After Edgar had sat silent and ignored through about fifteen minutes of the dialogue, he had suddenly jumped up, thrown his napkin into his plate and said, "You two are really something, you know it? Real comedians. You'd put Red Skelton in the shade." He then marched from the kitchen in disgust, but not

rapidly enough to get out of earshot before Samantha and Pop exploded into giggles. It had taken Samantha a good part of a week to cajole Edgar back into their midst.

It was getting close to seven o'clock, and Pop decided it was time to speak to Samantha in the kitchen, where she would be preparing dinner. A ritual had grown up which took place every night at this time. Pop would saunter into the kitchen and make an extremely derogatory remark about Samantha's cooking, and she would respond with an extremely caustic remark concerning Pop's age, character, or disposition. They both secretly looked forward to this exchange each night. The comments were often quite vicious. Last night Pop had peered over Samantha's shoulder into the soup she was stirring and said, "You know, you didn't have enough ground glass in last night's soup."

Samantha had whirled around, spoon in hand, and said, "I thought I strapped you into the chair this morning. How did you get out? It looks as though a full time nurse will soon be necessary. Or perhaps the old folks' home?"

"Don't be silly, Samantha. Edgar would never allow me to be taken away from him."

Samantha had turned away to hide her amusement, because to make an effort to show appreciation of each other's humor was not part of their game. Because she had laughed at Pop last night, she was sure to be especially caustic tonight. Pop moved into the kitchen for the kill. Inspecting the stove for possible targets, Pop's glance fell on the meat. "Cube steaks!" he exclaimed with delight. "Samantha, your cube steaks have that exotic hockey puck flavor that the finest restaurants can never quite match."

Samantha was sitting at the table, peeling potatoes. She didn't look up, but smiled rather sweetly, more to herself than at Pop's remark. "Oh, Pop. You're back from your walk. Pop, do you think one of the other men in your poker club could pick you up on Tuesdays for a while?

They have these classes for expectant mothers at the clinic, and since I'm a rookie at being pregnant Edgar thought it might be a good idea for me to attend. Would you mind having someone come by for you?"

Expectant mother classes? Pop thought of a dozen beautiful cracks, but something, he didn't know what, told him to hold his tongue. "Of course I don't mind, you ignoramus."

"Good boy. Pop, it feels so strange to be expecting. I feel all feminine and secretive and special."

"It's about time you figured out which sex you belong to," Pop said, but not very gruffly. Samantha was smiling to herself again, and Pop left the kitchen, feeling a little betrayed. Pregnancy seemed to be changing Samantha into a kind of typical female. If this was true, Pop was thankful that the gestation period for humans was only nine months and that Samantha would be Samantha again after a temporary flirtation with the commonplace. Satisfied with his evaluation of the situation, he went upstairs to get ready for dinner.

When he came back down the stairs, he heard Edgar's droning voice, so he stopped in the hallway to listen. Pop was a compulsive eavesdropper when it came to Edgar. He considered it a very forgivable crime because the only people who ever had private conversations in the house were Samantha and Pop himself. Because Edgar never said anything of consequence to anybody, he needed no privacy.

Samantha was speaking now. "Why can't we just move to a house with three bedrooms? You're a successful young junior executive, aren't you?" The mocking tone was there, but subdued under what sounded to Pop like real concern.

"Of course we will do that soon. But right now, we haven't the money. I didn't want to insinuate that it will be a real problem, I just wondered if you had considered it." Edgar

actually seemed to think his words carried some importance, but Pop, who was now flattened against the wall in an authentic eavesdropper position, knew that it was an impossibility.

"Well, Edgar, I'm sure Pop won't mind rooming with X when it becomes necessary. You're right, there is no problem."

Suddenly Pop's eavesdropping had become an unforgiveable sin. He had betrayed Samantha more seriously than she could ever betray him simply by acting typically pregnant. There was nothing to do but appear and plead guilty. Pop stepped into the den.

Samantha knew immediately that Pop had been listening to the conversation. She had laughed at him and his child-like curiosity often before when she had discovered him listening to Edgar talking on the phone. Occasionally, she would join Pop and listen for a while herself.

But this time she didn't laugh; instead, she spoke quickly as if she were very uncomfortable. "Hi Pop. We were just talking about roommate assignments for next year."

Pop didn't pay any attention to what she said, for he had just received his third and most astonishing shock of the evening. When he walked in, Edgar had been holding Samantha's hand, tenderly, and Samantha was leaning against his shoulder, dependently. There was no mistaking it; they looked like a team. Pop walked on through the den and into the livingroom, sat down in his chair, and looked out at the night. It had begun snowing again, so heavily that it was impossible to see out into the yard. The thought struck him, like a gleaming little stainless steel bullet, that he was a very old man and, like every very old man, would soon die.

Diane Gaston





LIMBO

BY

CARYL JOHNSTON

ILLUSTRATED BY

ANNE HEFLIN

INNIGO

Part 1. A Chance Encounter

In the lowlands, where the laurels grow,
Where the dust is thick in August
And roads of summer glaring as the snow,
I passed a young man beside the way
With a bundle on his knee, tears in his eye,
Sitting quietly, in the heat of day.

O young and slender man, all alone, alack!
Wherefore art thou sitting here?
His eyes were dark, his hair was black
As ever blackest night could be;
Yet none more handsome, none more fair
Seemed than this young man to me.

I stopped in the road, he turned his gaze
and I walked up to him.
“Art thou not hotly suffering in this blaze?
I wist thy tongue must be burning so!
How art thou called?” said I, curious,
And he sighing said, “My name is Innigo.”

“From where comest thou?” said I, and strange
My heart sould feel so still.
He lifted up his eyes to a far-lying range
As if to answer, Twas over there,
And spoke: “Look on those hills and rocks,
Look past this thin and listless air,

And then look past this parched road and sky—
And as far beyond that way
Have I come: and a far way to go have I.”
“But sure,” I said, “thou canst a tale
Of thy travels most surely tell,
For in speech thou appearest most hale.”

He laughed a short, short laugh and said,
"Tis true, a tale have I.
Long in the telling—but I sorely dread
That thou art not likely to be cheered."
"Why, my friend, so lovely and fair?"
I replied, but my heart was afeared.

"I was orphaned," he began, "at early age,—
My home lay near coastal parts
By the sea, that doth daily turn its foamy page
Upon the land. Twas said of my birthing day
My mother died, and herself
Went cold and still into the marshes' sway.

"Sweetest mother! Thou wast given a grave
And birds do make a nest in thee.
To an old boatman's daughter I was gave
To be cared for, in my youngest days.
She was dear as young frost,
Gentle as snow that lightens on the marsh haze.

"When I was grown up a dream came
Like a swift, dark bird across the sun—
The thing was strange and brought me shame.
The dream told me to leave and wander,
Like a sword cut a path before my feet
And tall and silent, it bade me follow.

Innigo passed his hand before his face
Pausing to regain a breath.
I fancied that I saw a space
Of fear flash through him, or anxiety,
And I said: "How could a dream
So strange and so stern, ever be?"

"Ah—but twas very strange for a man!
Twas as if thousands whispered
That I did not know who I am!
Weird voices tumbled through my soul
And headless birds swam—these so limp,
So lifeless, so compelling and so cold!"

As a ripple passes quickly through water
And as quickly disappears,
So I saw him tremblingly falter,
But he soon resumed the thread.
"So I readied then to leave;
My hopes weighed equally with my dread."

"The journey is companion to the dream—
I saw whole new lands
In a changed being, yet from which I did glean
Some pale remembrance, such as come in sleep,—
As if a drowsy echo, half-awake,
Trailed me, from broad valley to twinkling peak.

"At last I happened upon a green and wooded isle
Where flowers o'er-spilled the ground
And where a blue river did wind, as if to beguile
A traveler to reverie. There were countless trees—
Firs, water-oaks, poplars, yews,
Whose trains of moss went a-swaying in the breeze.

"I stayed in the wood until the day did wane
When fireflies, suddenly
Shaken out of evening's folds like seeded grain
O'erspread the fallow air—each spry tiny light
Sparkled like lamp of faery folk,
A gay hubbub making, in the misty lowland night.

"Ah, I was loath to quit th'enchantèd wood!
But I turned down a tree-spanned road
That led, I rightly guessed, where a house stood.
My footsteps fell like leaves, and sighed,
Restless as the wood around me
That was with beauty's secrets ceaselessly plied.

"I came soon to the house, white amid the forest,
And fancied I saw a female form
Glance anxiously from an attic, and on me rest;
But soon it passed. I knocked at once upon the door.
A lady answered—not old, but grey;
With eyes of twilight, and fingers white as hoar.



“ ‘Innigo!’ she cried, ‘Innigo!’ And all apace
She all but pulled me in,
Slammed shut the door, and showed me place.
I was seized o’er with a half-curious dismay
But awaited her commencement.
My amazed wonderings with speech to stay.

Part II. An Extraordinary Prison

“ ‘Do you marvel that I your name do know?’
Said the lady, coolly
Pointing to a portrait near, which did show
A wondrous lady, so life-like and so gay
She upon the canvas seemed
But to linger, and but wistfully stay.

“ ‘Tis your mother, as you may well guess,
Who died grievously long ago.
Your father then, of dire pain and stress
Soon followed. Ah, tis a bitter disease
That seeps in your family being
And warps incurably—a wild longing doth seize

“ ‘And mercilessly slashes up the soul!’
Twas then a distrust wrapped upon me
In the matter of this woman, cunning, but bold
And mean-spirited! About her there did hover
A sly invisible all-knowing air
Of condescension. Her secrets I swore to uncover.

“ ‘But the days. . .! So plain and blank did they pass
And idle, and each so like another,
As if they were on a machine like stitches cast
In a vengeful weaving. Pulled into the whirr and whine
And tightened, drawn, in strangled ignorance
Was I, in vain seeking to be free, or loosen time

“ ‘By questioning: but I could not the least pry
Against her swift repulsion.
My efforts were but feints, and swordless, went awry
Like mice to petty haunts. I soon found her name
Was Muriele—oh, shrewd, detestable!
She wore all the housedeys about her on a chain.

“Time was stretched out on the rack of routine—
Evenings we’d partake of wine,
I in chattering hazarded questions: but ever keen
She’d sent me off to sleep as ignorant as before.
One evening I did chance to ask her
Was there, perhaps, someone living on an upper floor?—

“—For I had never forgotten the girlish form
Half-glimpsed briefly at the window.
But she said nothing—if there were a storm
It breathed only within—it took no shape
Of visible raging. That night
My sleep was uneasy. . . what a burden tis to hate!

“When at last sleep did finally come
I dreamt—or so thought I—
A maiden stood beside me, as shy, as finely spun
As an insect web’s frail and moon-lit gleam
Glimmering through parted branches.
Regret swept me, that this be but a dream.

“She was clothed most gracefully in a blue
Deep as a river’s reflection
In dazed summertime; and her eyes too
Were of the same pure color. She spoke:
‘Take nothing from the lady Muriele—
Neither food nor drink.’ Then I awoke

“Suddenly, desiring to call out, to retain
The image; but as a mist
Trembles at the approaching sun and does wane
She faded. O I was self-cursed, and now bereft
In grimaced loneliness!
Just then I found a hair-ribbon that she left. . .

“’Twas a treasure indeed, a precious thing—
My joy went all a-fission
At the testament that I was not dreaming!
I resolved in faith to keep it as a token,
A strand fallen from the mystery-loom;
And inside my pocket I put it, safely hidden



"From Muriele's all too cold and curious eye.
From the palette of all day-colors
This dawned the fairest—twas blue and blithe
In cerulean tones, with tree-tops burnish'd
By the happy sun. The morning
Like incense, curled gold; I furnish'd

"Everything a joyous dimension. I was born
In simple being, and I loved
My fragile life. The tall-throated morn
Trilled a new-found song full tenderly
Through a hazy blush of flowers
In greeting to the broad-backed river and lea

"A-clamoring with birds. I the forest did rove,
The light-limned forest, where trees
Nodded in gentle agreeing, and the musky clove
Bloom'd, and did in ripen'd perfume swell.
Oh, I was enchanted
In high-arched orchard, field, and fell!

* * *

Innigo stopped speaking and wiped his brow.
"I am hard put," he said,
"To complete my tale. O that summer would allow
Some refuge of coolness!" We sat a moment silent
Each with unescorted thoughts,
While the glinting sun, climbing higher, rent

Like a fiery dagger the emblazoned sky.
"O I can barely tell,"
Said Innigo all a-moan, "or but hardly try
To recapture my lost sense, or my pain—
Twas as if an amnesiac devil took me!—
I forgot the maiden's words, in plain.

"For that evening I returned at the usual time
To the house. Lady Muriele was there,
Coldly polite, as ever, smug, and with her wine. . .
I took a sip, then all hastily put it down.
I must have flushed—
Some disorder, some agitation, must have shown

"But I tried to keep it hid and appear unruffled.
Yet I felt both ill and uneasy!
My body crackled and shook like cards all shuffled.
I excused myself, and fought my way to my room,
To my bed in flaring pain,
Where I lay down in a numb and lifeless swoon.

Part III. Flight

"What is disease?" said Innigo pensively.
"Does it canker-like
Whelm the body o'er, shrivelling greedily
The living bloom? Or, piecemeal and thick
Does it like patient strata
Settle slowly, and the heart but feebly tick

"Against the hard unseen encrusting weight?
Oh, I did feel diseases'd
That night, and moaned both long and late
Of my self-wrung misery. I pitched about
Like one adrift on a reeling sea,
Where for ballast my dizzy brain tossed out

"Encumbering visions—I had hallucinations
Of stretched, bled faces;
Of unrudder'd stars bleached out, and sensations
Of evil appended everywhere. It went on and on
Shrill and senseless, and awful,
Till at last I turned over and with a groan

"Opened my eyes. To my confusion the maid
Stood by, pity on her countenance
Engraved. Back and forth she shook her head
Murmuring gently, and did me softly chide
While she handed me a draught
And bid me take, saying t'would my pain subside.

"At length sweet lassitude and sleep did fill
My weary brain, and I slept.
When I awoke she with firm word held me still
And said: 'Innigo, this night must thou leave—
Make haste, little time remains,
Night ebbs away. Lady Muriele a revenge doth cleave



“ ‘To ever bitterer refinements. Innigo, I swear,
Thou art here much endanger’d:
Hurry, ere the sun stalks forth from his lair
To bellow out the day. Thou art not concious
Of Lady Muriele’s deceiving brain;
She gloats upon misfortune, and ever is anxious

“ ‘To trap with evils manifold thy unwary feet.
Go, while thou hast the time!’
‘No, Maid, I’ll not leave thee here in the keep
Of ghostly mystery that in this extraordinary prison
Forever prowls—come with me,
For I’ll not leave thee—tis my decision.’

“ ‘Yet she demurred, and fingered nervously
Her garment’s broideries,
Loath to reply. ‘I cannot go with thee—’
She said, but I insisting long did plead
That she accompany me as a guide,
For I could not go alone. At last she agreed

“ ‘Though with reluctance. Twas then I readied
For the flight. Twas before dawn;
The cool night air breathed dark and steadied,
Of us oblivious. The house like a keel
Was balanced on silence;
The very halls with noise seemed to reel

“ ‘As we moved, though we were fearfully silent.
Once upon the lawn, the chill
Of soundlessness pressed upon me as we went;
On a low sky the white-eyed moon cringed,
Half-hid by blinking clouds.
The wind stirred, and branches all unhinged

“ ‘Swung up as in dismay, and sparks of moonlight
Scurried back to the all-quenching dark.
I turned and whispered to the maid, ‘Tis not right
That I know not even thy name. I know of this land
Nothing, nor of thee, who art dear
Yet troubled: let me aid thee, if I can.’

“She murmured something half-aloud, shook her head
And pondered quietly for a moment
Before she spoke to me, and full smiling, said:
‘My name is Leila. When thou to the world about
Goest far, let not thy dreams
Come back here drifting. Fiercely turn and rout

“ ‘Thy wonderments—for they are like sad cypresses
Hovering over tombs, and whispering
Of things pass’d so long ago not a word expresses
Anything but regret.’ Her words did all dreadfully
Pierce my heart like the bitter herb.
‘What, Leila, sayest thou? Already full confus’dly

“ ‘My head sags o’er the abysm of comprehending
Where all is effort, and all efforts fail.
Thy words afflict me. Or am I to frenzy tending
Yet know it not, so that all the world a madness
Seems to me? Oh, Leila,
I’ll leave thee not! What place is this, where dimness

“ ‘Reigns, and sorrow cowers ever in hiding?’
As if in answer an owl’s cry
Rung throughout the wood; his dark tiding
Spurred Leila like a shock. Quickly she ran,
Pulling me behind. Trees moss-hung
Flashed by and swayed shivering, as if to fan

“Our heated passage. We came to a road leading outward
From the dark-throated forest; whitely
It glimmered like a strand of shell. Suddenly forward
I was thrust—‘Goodbye, Innigo, goodbye, Innigo. . .’
Was all I heard. Amazed,
I called the name of Leila, but only a fitful echo

“Twinged and brushed against the fallow air.
All was changed, a blank
Of solitude wrapp’d around me in a vast despair.
I looked to the wood, once lovely, now drear,
Sullen and uninviting. . .
Then to the road, indifferent and blear. . .”



* * *

Innigo stopped. My heart with love o'erflowing was,
And I wanted words, words
I sought, to mingle them with the stars. . .
But words, words? I stared at summer's burning clay
A word of cheer to seek,
And sought Innigo,—but I could not see him for the day.

END



MISS GRACE'S STORE

I felt small rivulets of sweat trickling down my forehead and down my legs. The sheet was soaked from a night of sweating. The sun was already hot on my face. I lowered my arm from my face, opened my eyes, and fixed them on the clock.

Six, already six. Why, it didn't even feel like I had slept at all. I got up, dressed quickly, and wiped the sleep out of my eyes. Today is Saturday, and today is the day I go to work for Miss Grace. I hadn't never worked for nobody before, least ways for pay. Yes sir, old Miss Grace gonna pay me a dollar to help her today. Maybe she'll need me every Saturday. I hope she will.

Mom wasn't up yet; so I looked in the refrigerator and got me a piece of ham and a cold biscuit. I didn't want to be late; so I ate my breakfast on the way to Miss Grace's.

Lord, it's hot today—hot even for the middle of July. The tar from the road already seared my feet as it stuck between my toes. The narrow paved road seemed to stretch and turn for miles before I finally stood in front of Nize Ridge Grocery Store. The walk to the store that morning had seemed awfully long, even though it only took fifteen minutes. Only seven o'clock. I was early. Miss Grace wouldn't be there to open up till eight. It was too hot to sit and wait; so I began to look around the old store.

Miss Grace's store wasn't much of a store. It didn't look near so fine as old man Martin's store. It looked for all the world like they wasn't nothing but hope holding it together. The boards was fallen and rotten. Down next to the ground there was holes all in the wood. Them holes, them holes was where her cats stayed. Miss Grace's cats was all in them holes a-hunting for rats, lizzards, and snakes. Nobody knew how many cats Miss Grace had, but I reckoned she had about twenty.

A slight breeze must have blown, for the old broken sign above the door was creaking a little. It kinder made me shudder to look at it. The old rusty sign looked like the limp and broken leg of a rabbit after a dog has near bit it off.

I walked up on the porch to wait for Miss Grace because I knew she would be here soon. I sat down on the bench, and I wondered if all of 'em would be here today. Old Mose, he'd be here for sure. He's been setting on this bench every Saturday as long as the bench has been here. Mary Monk would come by today too. I made a bet that she'd have on something red today. Well, that weren't no fair bet. She always wore red. Red was her fav-o-rite color.

My toes played in the dust on the old porch. I wrote—Tad Dixon—ten.

The sound of gravel crunching beneath the tires of a car brought me out of my thoughts. "Hi, Miss Grace."

"Morning, Tad. Ain't it hot?"

"Shore is."

Miss Grace took a big ring of keys out of her big straw purse. The funny-shaped gold one, it did the trick. She gave the old door a push, and it groaned on its hinges. The door sounded like it hurt when she opened it. Miss Grace walked quickly inside, set her purse down, and put some money in the cash register.

"Taddie boy, you go back yonder and start bringing the meat up here to the front."

I nodded my head and started for the back

of the store. That Miss Grace, she sure is a strange woman. Kinder ugly too—what with that eye of hers. She's powerful ugly. Don't never comb her hair. It looks like gray wire, and her eye! It don't see—that eye don't. It's gray like her hair, and it don't have no little black part in it. Mom says not having the little black part is why she can't see.

Meat! My stomach felt sick when I looked at it. Miss Grace didn't have no cooler for her meat. She just put it in the back of the store every evening when she closed up. The meat was funny looking. I looked at the turkey necks; they was plumb blue and they was flies a-sitting on them trying to suck some of the blood out of their puffed up blue veins. The hog jowls was black with grease running out, and the balony looked green with a little white coating around it.

"Miss Grace? You not thinking about this meat. It's done spoilt."

"Hush your mouth, boy. You want them blacks to hear you? Here take this vinegar and soak them meats good. And them blacks? They won't know no difference—no difference at all."

"Mom says that spoilt meat is bad fer you, and that you shouldn't eat it."

"Your mother's got modern ideas, but her modern ideas ain't putting no money in her pocket. Now, hush up and do as you are told!"

I filled the pan with vinegar and put the meat in for soaking. Flies buzzed all around me and the smell of spoilt meat and vinegar made me throw up, throw up right in the pan too.

Folks come in all morning. Old Mose he come in like always. I watched him buy some of the turkey necks. I wanted to tell him they was spoilt, but I was afraid. No matter, Mose is old. He's been eating the stuff for years and it ain't hurt him yet. No, ain't hurt him, but his grandbaby sure enough did die last summer. Probably he got sick from sucking on one of them spoilt turkey necks.

"Tad, Tad boy. Quit your day-dreaming; it's lunch time."

I had forgot my lunch, so I just watched Miss Grace eat her deviled ham sandwiches and ever now and then watched her feed one of her cats. Fed him from her fork. Fed them cats real good, she did. Miss Grace she ain't so bad, I guess. She ain't got nobody—only them cats. She do feed them cats good. I wondered how fat and sassy them cats would be if they was to have to eat them blue, bloodless turkey necks.

The day passed slowly—too slowly. I did everything Miss Grace said. I stacked cans and and put out the fruit. Mary Monk came in and

we chatted a little. I liked that old woman. She wore red too. Had a red scarf over her curly black hair.

"Tad, spend more time working and less time talking. You won't get rich being nice to nobody, especially them blacks."

No, I didn't get rich. I got a dollar for my work that day, and the only fun I had at all was talking to old Mary Monk. I didn't like working for Miss Grace, but I knew I'd go back next Saturday, and the next and do the same work. I wanted that dollar, and I could only hope that them blue turkey necks with them blow flies on 'em wouldn't hurt nobody, least ways nobody good.

Vickie McGucken

GENTLEMAN'S BET

Sydney Hyland was a grub. That's what all the other cadets at the Academy called him: the Grub. His grey trousers were too long and baggy for his short legs, and his Eisenhower jacket was limp on his skinny frame. His tie had a knot that seemed as big as his neck, and his shirt sagged, apparently from lack of starch. He was always losing his uniform cap, so that you could see that his hair was always in a ragged cut. His shoes were dull from polish that hadn't been rubbed into the leather, and his brass belt buckle was covered with a coppery tarnish. When he walked, his gait was a slouch. When he stood, he leaned against a wall. When he sat, the point of contact was his spine rather than his buttocks. As I said, he was a grub.

Sydney was lazy, too, but in a special kind of way. Most lazy people are bums: when they don't want to do something, they simply don't do it. Sydney was different. He didn't just duck out of doing things; he arranged conditions so that he didn't have to do the things obnoxious to him.

For example, when he first came to the

Academy, all the upperclassmen would make him shine their shoes. Sydney wished to evade this chore, which all the new cadets had to perform. One day one of the seniors ordered him to do a burn shine.

For those of you who haven't been to a military school, I should describe a burn shine as done like this: you gob about half a can of shoe polish over the toe of each shoe, and then you set it on fire. You wait about three seconds, blow the fire out, and buff off whatever polish is left on the toe. The fire will have melted just enough of the polish to seep down into the pores of the leather. A normal polish over the burn shine doesn't go into the pores, and a mirrorlike shine can be achieved fairly quickly.

When Sydney was ordered to do the shine, he didn't say a word. He gobbled the polish on, looking bored while he worked. Then he lit the polish on both shoes at the same time. But he didn't wait three seconds after he'd set the polish on fire; he waited eight seconds. And he didn't blow the fire out; he gave a feeble

puff at one of the shoes that failed to extinguish the flame. By the time that the fire was put out, it had burned through the polish and had scorched the leather of both shoes, ruining them.

The senior with the scorched shoes put Sydney at attention, where he stood with the same bland, bored face while he was yelled at for five solid minutes. Thereafter, nobody bothered to demand shoeshines of Sydney, burnt or unburnt.

And then there was the time that all of the cadet officers in Sydney's platoon began to persecute him on the drill field, screaming curses and insults at him, forcing him to sing dirty cadences, and making him run round the drill field while carrying his M-1 rifle. Sydney changed things on the Alumni Day Parade.

Perhaps I'd better pause again to give a few words of explanation to those of you who aren't Academy buffs. Alumni day is a sort of visitor's day for graduates of the Academy—preferably graduates with lots of money to donate. On this day, the cadets have a full dress parade for the benefit of the alumni. Now, the important thing to observe about a full-dress parade is that, if you make a mistake in drill, you must not try to correct it. You fake it, act as though nothing had happened. If you're lucky, the watchers on the reviewing stand won't notice it, and your platoon will win the competition.

Sydney was in the Second platoon, Company A. For the last two years, the Second of A had constantly won parades, and it was a safe bet that they'd win this parade, too. But this time, they hadn't counted on the Grub. When the platoon made a column right, Sydney managed to bump into somebody in the squad next to him. When the platoon came to a halt across the field from the reviewing stand, Sydney was out of rank by three feet. When the command was given to go to right shoulder arms, he went to left shoulder arms. And

when the Second of A passed the reviewing stand—before all the alumni—there was Sydney: rifle on the wrong shoulder, out of step, and occasionally stumbling on the heels of the boy in front of him.

The Second of A did not win the parade. Sydney stood at his usual, blank-faced attention while the upperclassmen in his platoon raved at him. But after that incident, if Sydney failed to appear at drill, his absence was never reported.

It reminded me of the story about Br'er Rabbit and the tar baby. Br'er Rabbit had gained his freedom from Br'er Fox by making him want to throw Br'er Rabbit in the briar patch, which was the very place where Br'er Rabbit wanted to be. Sydney was like that. He could get people so disgusted with his apathetic attitude that they would want to leave him alone.

I can't say exactly when it was that I first became aware of Sydney's talent, but I am sure that I was the only person in the whole school who noticed it. Maybe it was because I alone fully appreciated Sydney's finer qualities that I went along with the plot against him.

There were four of us, all seniors—me, and Ray Jonston, and Brett Cooper, and a fat boy whose name I have forgotten now. We were in Brett's room one night shooting the bull. Brett was the golden boy of the school—big, blond, strong and graceful. He was both liked and envied, because he made touchdowns in football seem effortless, because he could plant a stinkbomb in Old Man Bierce's algebra class without thinking anything of it, and because when he went home for vacation, he returned to a well-stacked girl friend and a sleek new Jaguar.

Right now he was talking about how to crack down on freshmen and keep them in line. "I don't care who they are," he said, dragging on a cigarette, "you can get any freshman on the stick if you know how to kick him in the

ass just right."

Ray Jonston, who was sprawled out on one of the beds, shifted his position slightly. "I don't know," he said slowly. "Some of these guys are just born losers. I don't think you can do a damn thing with some people."

"Yeah," the fat boy piped up. "Those freshmen this year are the sorriest bunch of slobs I've ever seen. Hopeless."

I said nothing, waiting for Brett to respond.

"Bull!" he said. "I bet I could take any freshman who's here right now and get him in line in three months. Go ahead: pick any deadbeat you want."

"Well. . ." said Ray. He thought a moment. "What about the Grub?"

Brett cocked the corner of his mouth into a sneer. Hyland? Hell, he's nothing. I could, in no time at all, have him asking permission to breathe."

I wasn't so sure about that, but I still kept my mouth shut. Brett is a hard person to argue with; he even looks convincing.

But apparently Ray was not going to be put down so easily. "Yeah?" he said. "Then why don't you? Put your money where your mouth is."

The sneer froze on Brett's face. His eyebrows gradually tightened. He drew the cigarette out of his mouth with deliberate slowness. Nobody said a word. Then Brett's eyebrows drew apart. He tilted his head back and blew out a ring of smoke. His mouth relaxed into an easy smile. "Okay," he said. "You're on. I'll get the Grub in line. Three months from today."

"How much is the bet?" the fat boy asked.

"Fifty dollars," said Brett.

Ray jerked up to a sitting position so fast that the bedsprings squealed. "Fifty dollars?" he yelped.

I spoke up. "Why not, Ray? You yourself said that the Grub couldn't be converted.

Nobody else has done it. You've got a sale bet. Besides," I added, "if Brett can really do what he says, it'll be worth all that money just to see it happen."

Ray bit his lip and rubbed the palm of his hand across his jaw slowly. I knew what he was thinking. He was sure that in a few weeks Brett would lose interest completely in Sydney. The bet would be a sure thing.

He said, "Yeah. All right. It's a bet. Fifty dollars."

After that, it was just a matter of details. Brett would have three months from this day to make Sydney a model cadet. None of the rest of us would interfere in any way.

"He's going to be my creation," Brett said. "I'm going to make him a work of art. A masterpiece. My masterpiece."

There was a little quibbling over who was going to decide who had won and who was going to insure the payment of the stakes. But Brett proposed a solution to that problem, too. "Look," he said, gesturing towards me. "Danny here is an impartial man, right? We all trust him, right?"

"Well, sure," said Ray. It made me feel good to hear that. It means a lot to know you're trusted.

Brett leaned forward. "Okay," he said earnestly. "Now, here's the gig: Ray and I will take fifty dollars out of our allowance and we'll put it in Danny's account. Danny can hold the bets, and he can act as the judge as to who wins the money. How about it, Danny?"

I hesitated. "I don't know," I said.

"Aw, c'mon. Look. I'm willing to let you control the money, and I'll go along with any decision you make."

"That's fair enough with me," Ray said. "Go ahead, Danny. You be the judge."

Well, why not? Both Brett and Ray had confidence in me, and I was curious to see if Brett could handle Sydney. Besides, I wouldn't even have to pay a cent to find out. "All right," I said, "but be sure you deposit the

money in small amounts. We don't want to attract the attention of the school treasurer. He might think I had got a hot hand in a crap game."

The higher the stakes are in a bet, the more there is to lose, and the more daring the bet becomes. And the more daring the bet, the harder somebody will try to win it. It's a point of honor. So when Brett took up the challenge, he went for Sydney with a serious determination to remold the Grub.

"Hyland!" he'd yell during inspections. "You're a grub! Grubby shoes! Grubby brass! Grubby face! Grubby, grubby, grubby!"

"Hyland," he would purr on the drill field when Sydney did something wrong. "Sydney Hyland, the wonder boy. Knock off ten pushups, wonder boy. And for every one you do wrong, I'll have you do ten more."

"Hyland," he would say lazily during dinner, "at this table we are refined. We are gentlemen. We do not tolerate the dregs of society who do not hold their forks properly and who eat like swine. Ten-shut!"

"Duhee, Hyland," he would snicker at Sydney when they passed on the sidewalk.

"Brace, Hyland!" he would snap at him when he came into Sydney's room. "Run those chins in! I want to see a chin on your neck for every year of your life! Now sing the Alma Mater, Hyland! And this time I want to hear it sung so that the alums will weep!"

Wherever Sydney went, whatever Sydney did, Brett was always there. And he never let up on Sydney for a minute. Sydney wasn't easy to crack, though. He could always counter Brett's hazing with his don't-give-a-damn attitude. Certainly the pressure was tight on Sydney, but he was still the Grub. Three weeks passed before Brett made his first real breakthrough. It happened in night study hall. I was halfheartedly catching up on back reading in my physics text. Somebody

in front of me was reading a girlie magazine hidden inside his French book. Several seats farther ahead of me sat Sydney. He was looking down at a notebook and idly rolling a ball-point pen between the tip of his thumb and the tips of his fingers. Brett was sitting right across the aisle from Sydney. Every now and then, he would turn his head slightly and inhale slowly and loudly through his nose. Thoughts of Newton's universal law of gravitation faded into the background of my mind. Brett was up to something, and I wanted to see what it was.

"Hyland!" he whispered suddenly, breaking the silence in the large room. Sydney ignored him.

"Hyland!" The whisper was louder this time. Sydney slowly raised his head and looked at Brett. The pen was now buried in the fingers of his clenched hands.

"Hyland," Brett said, and his whisper became still louder, "why don't you get some deodorant? You smell like a God damned pig."

Sydney's jaw tightened. There was a snap! as the pen broke in his grip.

Brett grinned. "Hey, Hyland," he said, turning back to his books, "you got ink all over your hands."

An upperclassman can be nasty and sarcastic toward a freshman. But, however tough and vicious he becomes, his hazing is useless and ineffective if he gets the impression that his victim doesn't care. On the other hand, once the upperclassman has reached his subject, the freshman can never again completely convince his tormenter that he is indifferent.

In the days that followed, Sydney kept his same bored expression. But it looked like a mask now, a deliberate attempt to hide the hatred that everybody knew was there. He acted just as lazy as before, but now his laziness seemed to be an act—an attempt to strike back at Brett.

And then I began noticing other changes. At one inspection, I'll be damned if Sydney didn't have his shoes shined. And his brass seemed less dirty than before. He went two weeks solid without seeing the commandant once, and his grade in discipline rose from a D to a C. Okay. They were little things. But they were things entirely foreign to Sydney's character and his reputation. When I mentioned this to Brett, he laughed. "Yeah. The little grub hates my guts, so he'll improve some just to get me off his back," he said. "I'm not going to get off his back," he said.

The next parade was won by the Second of A. And the next. And the next. And still Brett did not let up on Sydney. If anything, he began to step things up. I first noticed this at one of the room inspections.

Both Brett and myself were inspecting officers that day. At first, nothing seemed out of the ordinary. When we got to Sydney's room, Brett kicked the doorframe, and before the echoes of the crash had died down the hallway, he yelled, "Room, ten-shut!" Both Sydney and his roommate snapped to it, and we stepped inside.

All of this was quite normal. It's the standard operating procedure for inspecting any room. You go inspect the cadets, saying, "Stick so-and-so, dirty brass," or "Stick so-and-so, merits on shoes." Then you inspect the beds to see if they're made up right, or the furniture to see if it gets any dust on your white glove, or the closets to see if the clothes are hanging in the proper order, from left to right.

I hadn't expected Brett to give Sydney any merits by a long shot. Still, I was surprised when he suddenly swore behind me. I turned from where I was inspecting one of the beds to see what was the matter. Brett had pulled out Sydney's fatigues from his locker and was shaking them in front of

Sydney's poker face. "What is this mess, Hyland?" he yelled. He threw the fatigues down on the floor, where something brown and gooey seeped out of the clothing and on to a throw rug. An unmistakable toasted aroma filled the air, and then I realized what had happened.

Somebody had stuffed peanut butter into Sydney's fatigue pockets.

That was the first incident. Then, about four days later, Ray Jonston came to my room. "Danny," he said to me, "I'm throwing in the towel. Brett can have the money. As far as I'm concerned, he's won the bet."

I was surprised. "How come you're giving up so soon?" I asked.

He squirmed a minute, and then he said, "Look Danny, I've never been in love with this school, but I want to be able to graduate. I've been here almost four years, and when I get out of this hole, I want to have a diploma to show for it."

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"Hazing, dammit! They throw you out of school if they can pin hazing on you. Maybe they don't do it often, but after last drill I decided that I don't want to take any chances."

"Last drill? What happened last drill?"

"Oh. That's right. You were sick that day. Well, look. Brett started in on Sydney, just like always. Started to inspect him, you know?"

"Yeah?"

"So when he opened the bolt to Sydney's rifle, the inside was packed solid with shoe polish."

I felt a chill on my teeth as I sucked in my breath. After a while, I blew it out. "All right," I said, "let's go see Brett."

Charges of hazing are always hard to prove. At one time or another, every upper-classman has done some hazing, and no freshman ever reports it. For each freshman knows

that turning somebody in for hazing is the act of a traitor. Such an act would invite the wrath and scorn of every other cadet in the Academy. A stool pigeon has no friends. But in those rare cases in which hazing is proven, the penalty is rarely less than expulsion from school. If Brett was caught, Ray had good reason to worry. For that matter, so did I.

We found Brett in his room, getting ready for soccer practice. He was even more cheerful than usual. But when Ray told him that he was willing to concede the bet, his eyes widened, his mouth opened, and he froze for a moment. Then he laughed and clapped Ray on the shoulder. "Keep your money for a while," he said. He pulled his sweatshirt on and trotted out the door before either of us could answer. "You haven't seen anything yet," he called over his shoulder, "worth waiting for."

He was sure enough right on that last count.

Hindsight is a convenient thing. You can look back and see all of the things that you should have noticed: the look of tension, the veiled threat, the tightening of the body muscles. They all told you what was going to happen. But you just didn't notice.

Yet who would have suspected what was going to happen? Not me. Certainly not Brett as he came out to drill formation the next day. What was there to see? The same old file of straggling cadets, trooping reluctantly toward where their platoons were to form up. What was there to hear? The usual joking and grumbling. The clicks and snaps of rifle bolts opening and closing. The cacophony of the band tuning up.

Nothing seemed out of the ordinary when Brett walked in front of Sydney and said, "Hyland, you're a smelly little grub." He'd done the same thing for weeks and weeks.

But Sydney's reaction was not ordinary. He picked up his rifle and charged into Brett,

swinging it. Brett was easily stronger than Sydney, and after they pulled Sydney off, somebody kicked him in the face so that his upper lip was swollen for days. Still, there wasn't much doubt as to who won the fight. Brett had a broken nose, three cracked ribs, and a dislocated jaw. He had to have a clamp for a gash in the top of his head. He had a black eye.

I saw Ray right after drill.

"Well," I said, "I guess you won the bet."

"Oh, that's funny," Ray said acidly. "Real funny. Do you know what's going to happen now?"

I did, and I didn't like it any more than Ray. Tomorrow, Sydney would see the commandant. Gradually, the details of our bet would be uncovered, and then we'd really catch hell.

"They're going to give us the axe," Ray predicted, his voice cracking. "They're going to throw us out on our asses."

I felt irritated. "All right, dammit!" I said. "So what? There's not a thing we can do about it." As Ray opened his mouth to argue, I pressed on. "I'll tell you what. The guardhouse adjoins the commandant's office. You can hear everything that goes on in there. If it'll make you feel any better, I'll listen in on what happens."

"How? You're not on guard duty tomorrow, are you?"

"No," I said, "but five dollars will make me the substitute for anybody at any time."

So that was how we did it. I bribed the cadet on duty that day to let me take his place, and then I waited.

Guard duty means ringing bells for classes, answering telephones, and making announcements over the public address system. Ordinarily it's annoying and boring work, but that day I found it welcome. Anything that would keep me from thinking about what I was waiting for was welcome.

About one o'clock in the afternoon, Sydney knocked on the door of Major Sills's office.

Major Sills said, "Come in." I could visualize Sydney stepping in, coming to attention, and saluting. I heard a rustling and crackling, and I knew that Major Sills was pretending to study the papers on his desk. When the rustling stopped, I knew that he was now looking up at Sydney as though he were seeing him for the first time.

I ran my hand across the slick surface of the guardhouse desk and watched as it left a trail of sweat. I heard Major Sills speak.

"Mister Hyland, I understand that you had a little disagreement with Mister Cooper."

"Yes, sir," Sydney said.

"What happened?"

"I beat him up, sir."

"You put him in the hospital, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir."

I heard a creaking, and I knew that Major Sills was leaning back in his chair. "Mister Hyland," he said, "why? Just tell me why."

I felt a jag of pain and I realized that my lower lip was clamped between my teeth. I could visualize Sydney's expressionless face.

"I guess I lost my temper, sir," he said.

"Was that all? You just lost your temper?"

"Yes, sir."

"You just hit Mister Cooper for no reason at all?"

"Yes, sir. I lost my temper."

There was a silence.

"I see," Major Sills said. "That will be all for now, Mister Hyland."

I felt myself going limp with relief.

"Yes, sir," Sydney said.

Two days later, the word was out that the Grub had been expelled. On the day he

was to leave, I passed his room. The door was open. He was dressed in civies, packing the last of his bags. His lip was still swollen, but not as much as it had been before. He seemed relaxed and casual.

Suddenly, I wanted to go in and say something to him. I didn't quite know whether I wanted to say goodbye or good luck or that I was sorry. None of them seemed quite right.

And then he saw me. He glanced up from his bags and looked me square in the eyes. I'm not sure exactly what I saw in his face. It wasn't fear, or bitterness, or even hate. But it seemed to challenge me to speak, to say whatever I wanted to say.

I started to do it, started to say something, but no sound came out, and I felt as if Sydney had known all along that I would say nothing. I turned and walked on down the hallway. I never saw him again.

David Paul Camp



